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ABSTRACT

The personal effects of racial discrimination were studied through the responses of 50 adolescents enrolled in a precollege summer program to hypothetical scenarios. Half of the participants were female, 2 were European American, 8 Asian American, 21 African American, and 19 Latino. Expected response categories derived from the work of J. Feagin (1991) were: (1) withdrawal; (2) resigned acceptance; (3) verbal; and (4) physical. Thirty-five percent of these adolescents responded by withdrawal, and 39% gave verbal responses. Resigned acceptance was the response of 21%. Of the minority students, 98% found the hypothetical scenarios likely to happen to themselves or their friends, or they knew someone to whom the situation had occurred. Ninety-five percent of all respondents found the scenarios highly realistic. It may be that these adolescents found withdrawal or verbal responses most socially appropriate. In a threatening situation, a passive response may serve a self-protecting function. Physically aggressive responses may be perceived as inappropriate in many settings, and it is not surprising that physical counterattack responses were infrequently chosen. Two of the scenarios are attached. (Contains two graphs and three references.) (SLD)

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Responses to Acts of Discrimination among Adolescents

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Poster presented at the Black Caucus Pre-Conference of the Society for Research in Child Development biennial meeting, Washington, D.C., April 1-3, 1997

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The purpose of this study is to better understand the personal effects of racial discrimination. In increasingly diverse pluralistic environments (i.e., schools, neighborhoods, etc.), people of color are often confronted with situations where they are targets of discrimination. The reality of discrimination is often overlooked in consideration of the benefits of cultural pluralism.

If we endorse the benefits of multicultural education, we need to investigate how ethnic minorities in multiethnic settings cope with discrimination that occurs in pluralistic environments (i.e., a Latino student bussed into a predominantly European American school

who experiences racial discrimination at a convenience store around the corner from the school). This study examines how minority adolescents respond to acts of discrimination. An equally important theoretical concern is the strength of ecological validity of measures of responses to discrimination.

Feagin (1991) describes four responses to acts of racial/ethnic discrimination used by middle-class African Americans. Understanding types of behaviors displayed by ethnic minority youth in multicultural settings may lead to a better understanding of impacts of discrimination.

Response Types

WITHDRAWAL - the target of the act of discrimination typically retreating from the situation

RESIGNED ACCEPTANCE - the target continues the interaction with perpetrator of the act

VERBAL - the target responds to the perpetrator by making a verbal statement challenging the act

PHYSICAL - the target displays a hostile physical act in response to the perpetrator

Feagin (1991)

These and other typologies have been used in previous studies that interview adolescents on ways they have dealt with past acts of discrimination (Phinney & Chavira, 1995; Feagin, 1991). However, another method to examine response types would be a measure of an individual's preferred response to discrimination across multiple situations.

Methods

Participants consisted of 50 adolescents enrolled in university summer pre-college programs

25 females; 21 African American; 19 Latino; 8 Asian American; 2 European American

Participants ranged from 16 - 20 yrs. old

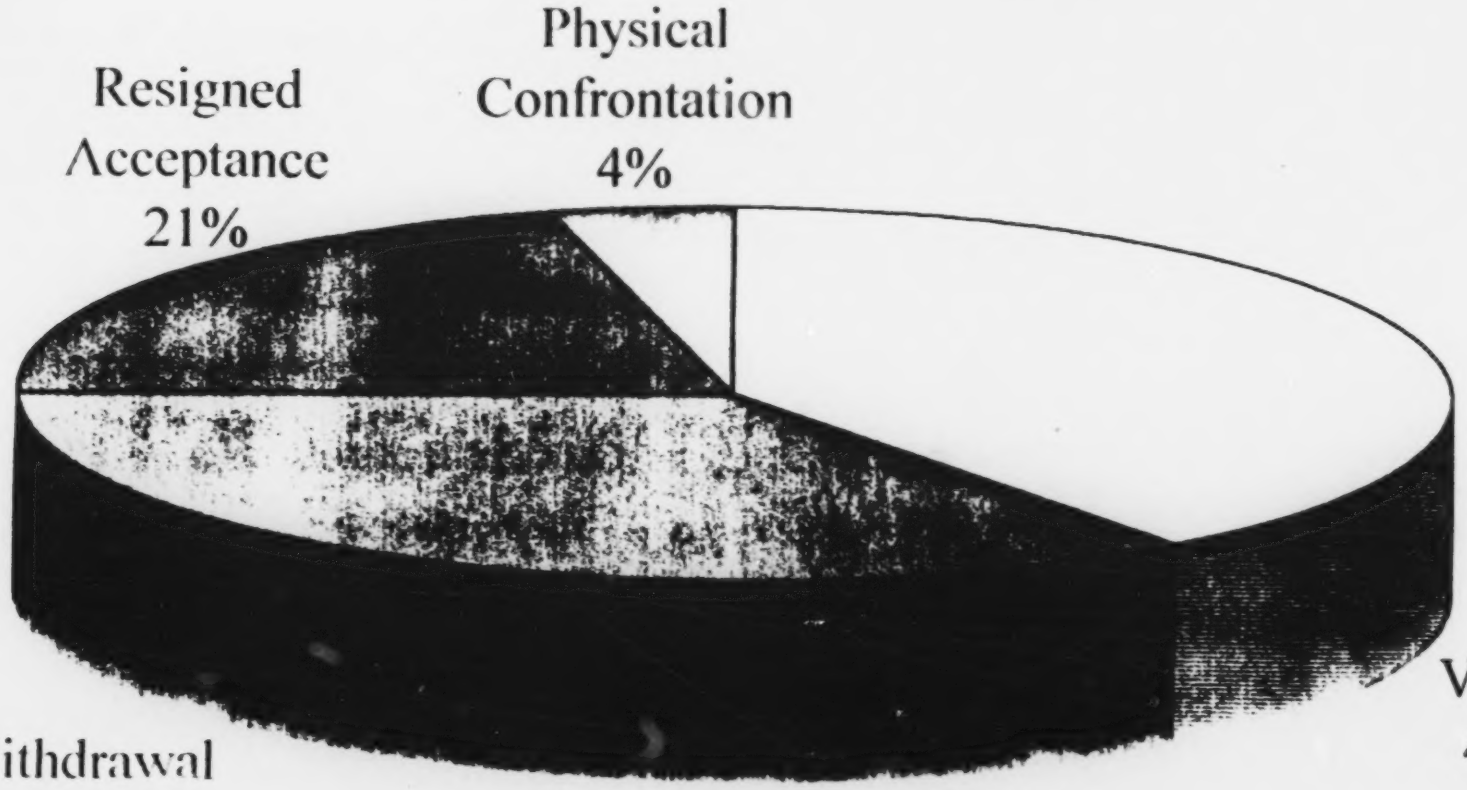
Responses on hypothetical scenarios were summed across situations; the highest score determined one's preferred response style

Realism and likelihood of scenarios were measured in free response format

Results

- 74% responded by either verbal response or by withdrawing from the situation (39% verbal response, 35% withdrawal)
- 21% responded with resigned acceptance
- 4% responded with a physical confrontation
- 98% of minority students found the hypothetical scenarios likely to happen to themselves or their friends, or personally knew someone to whom the situation had occurred
- 95% of all participants found the scenarios highly realistic

Distribution of Response Types



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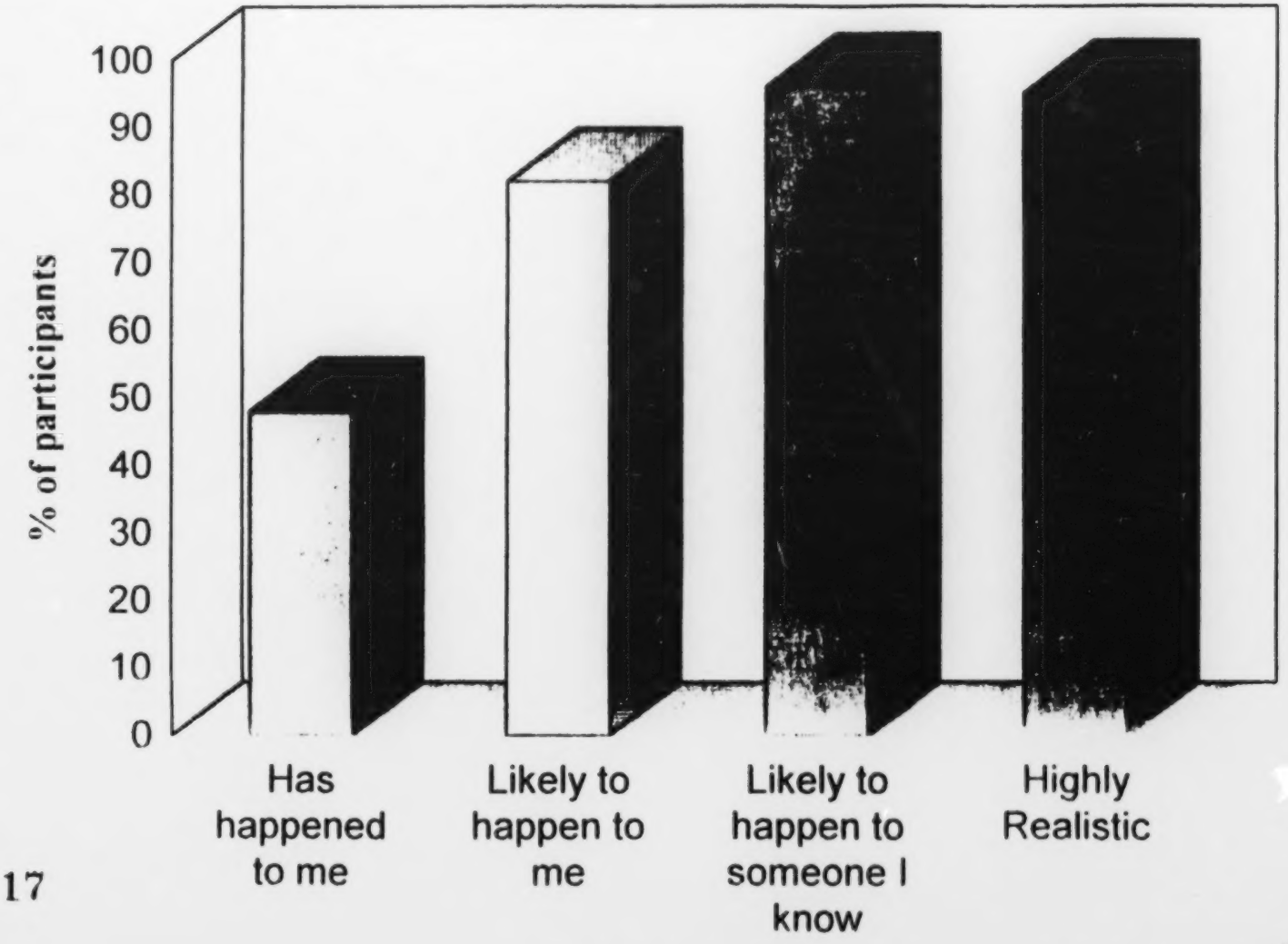
Likelihood and Realism of Scenarios



Discussion

Individuals are likely to use verbal or withdrawal response types when faced with discrimination because these response types may be perceived by adolescents as socially appropriate. Specifically, verbal responses to discrimination may be perceived by ethnic minority adolescents as a socially appropriate proactive response in situations where they have been treated unfairly. Similarly, withdrawal responses may be perceived as a socially appropriate passive response. If an individual feels intimidated in a

particular situation, s/he may choose to withdraw himself/herself from the situation rather than engaging in a proactive response. In fact, in threatening situations, a passive response may serve a self-protecting function.

Physically aggressive responses may be perceived as inappropriate in many settings. It is therefore not surprising that physical counterattack responses are used infrequently.

Resigned acceptance can be thought of as "ignoring" the discrimination and may be a less adaptive

response. This finding is promising in that it reveals that children do not tend to ignore personally targeted discrimination.

Concerning ecological validity, the hypothetical scenarios were considered highly realistic. Many students interviewed revealed that they or their friends had already experienced the same or similar situation. Therefore, these types of scenarios may be considered ecologically valid.

References

Feagin, J. (1991). The continuing significance of race: antiblack discrimination in public places. American Sociological Review, 56, 1, 101.

Phinney, J. & Chavira, V. (1995). Parental ethnic socialization and adolescent coping with problems related to ethnicity. Journal of Research on Adolescence, 5, 1, 31-53.

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A Trip to the Mall

It is a real hot day and Harold decides that he is going to go to the mall to see a movie and escape the heat. After arriving at the mall, Harold goes to the theater to buy a ticket to see a movie that he has wanted to see for a long time. It is 2:00pm and Harold realizes he just missed the 1:30 show. The next showing is at 3:30. So, Harold buys a ticket for the 3:30 show and decides that he will walk around the mall and look for a cool tie for his graduation outfit as well as picking out a graduation gift. Harold's Dad said that Harold could pick out a CD-Boom-Box for a graduation gift. Harold goes to the electronic stores in mall. After visiting the first two, he notices that a mall security guard is watching him and often would follow him around the stores. After leaving a large electronics store, the guard approaches Harold and says, "Excuse me son, would you please step over here?" Harold follows the security guard to the mall security department. At the security office, the security guard looks through Harold's jacket. He finds nothing and says, "Hmm,...I thought I saw you lifting merchandise. You're free to go."

If you were Harold, how likely would you . . .

(a) Quietly walk away from the situation and try to put it out of your mind.

Very likely			**Maybe**			**Not Likely**
7	6	5	4	3	2	1

(b) Leave and wonder why there are so many punks who shoplift things and cause innocent people to be accosted.

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

(c) Say to the security guard, "Excuse me officer, what made you so suspicious of me? I am interested in knowing why you followed me through those electronic stores?"

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

(d) say forcefully up in the guard's face, "Officer, I noticed that you followed me through all of the electronics stores and I am appalled of everything that happens in this mall, that you are so interested in me. What is your name?"

7	6	5	4	3	2	1

Looking for a Job

Shawn applies for a cashier job at Willow Book Store which is located on the other side of town. He sees an ad in the newspaper that advertises:

CASHIER WANTED
WILLOW BOOK STORE
945 Pedro St.
Will interview same day.

The next day after school Shawn takes the bus to the bookstore so that he can fill out an application. Shawn arrives at the bookstore and asks to speak to the store manager. He asks the manager for an application and asks if he is currently trying to fill an open position. The store manager says, "Well, we have an open cashier position, but I don't need to fill it right away." After Shawn fills out the application he asks the manager, "Would it be possible to have an interview now?" The manager replies, "No. I don't think you'd be working happy here."

If you were Shawn how would you react in that situation? How likely would you . . .

(a) say, "Thanks for your time." to the store manager with and politely exit the store.

Very likely **Maybe** **Not Likely**

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

(b) Thank the store manager while thinking to yourself, "I don't really want to work in a book store, anyway!"

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

(c) firmly say, "The job posting in the newspaper says that you would be interviewing on the spot. I would like to have my interview now."

7 6 5 4 3 2 1

(d) Purposefully knock a stack of books on the floor of the store and say, "This is a bunch of foolishness!"

7 6 5 4 3 2 1